PIJSSL

Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature

A Peer-reviewed Multidisciplinary e-Journal with SJIR 2025 = 6.034 & ISSN: 2581-6675

Vol. 09, No. 05 (May 2026) **DOI:** 10.51879/PIJSSL/090507

Email: editor.pijssl@gmail.com | **Website:** www.pijssl.com

OPEN ACCESS

Power and Authority in Daruwalla's Poetry

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of power and authority in the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla, a major voice in post-independence Indian English literature. Daruwalla's work reflects a deep engagement with political structures, institutional control, and the ethical complexities of governance in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives from postcolonial studies and power theory, particularly the work of Michel Foucault, the study explores how authority operates through visible and invisible mechanisms such as violence, surveillance, and administrative systems. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that power in Daruwalla's poetry is not centralized but dispersed across networks that influence both external structures and internal consciousness. His depiction of state institutions, border spaces, and conflict zones reveals the contradictions inherent in authority, where the pursuit of order often results in coercion and moral ambiguity. The study further highlights the ethical dilemmas faced by individuals within systems of power, emphasizing the human cost of institutional control. Ultimately, the paper argues that Daruwalla's poetry presents power as a fragile and contested force, shaped by historical and social contexts, and invites a critical reassessment of authority in the modern world.

Keywords: *Keki N. Daruwalla; power and authority; Indian English poetry; postcolonial literature; Michel Foucault; surveillance; violence; political poetry; ethics; state power.*

1. Introduction

Keki N. Daruwalla stands as one of the most compelling voices in post-independence Indian English poetry, distinguished by his sharp engagement with violence, history, and the structures of power that shape human experience. Writing in a socio-political landscape marked by border conflicts, communal tensions, and bureaucratic expansion, Daruwalla departs from romantic or purely lyrical traditions and instead foregrounds the realities of governance, authority, and institutional control. His poetry reflects a world in which power is not abstract but deeply embedded in everyday life, manifesting through state mechanisms, military presence, and social hierarchies.

A defining feature of Daruwalla's work is his intimate familiarity with systems of authority, shaped in part by his professional experience in the Indian Police Service. This background enables him to depict power not merely as an external force but as a lived reality that affects both those who exercise it and those who are subjected to it. His poems frequently explore borderlands, administrative spaces, and conflict zones, where authority is most visible and most contested. In these settings, power appears both necessary and problematic, functioning as a means of maintaining order while simultaneously generating violence and fear.

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Daruwalla's poetry suggests that authority is rarely stable or absolute. Instead, it is marked by tension, contradiction, and ethical ambiguity. Institutions that claim legitimacy often rely on coercion, while individuals caught within these systems struggle to reconcile duty with moral responsibility. The presence of violence in his poetry is closely tied to the exercise of power, revealing how authority often sustains itself through force rather than consensus.

This paper argues that Daruwalla's poetry interrogates the nature of power and authority by exposing their dependence on violence, surveillance, and systemic control. Through his depiction of political institutions, landscapes, and human interactions, Daruwalla reveals that authority is not a fixed or coherent force but a fragile construct shaped by historical, social, and ethical complexities.

2. Problem Statement

The poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla has been widely recognized for its engagement with themes such as violence, history, and landscape. Critics have frequently emphasized his realistic portrayal of social conflict and his ability to capture the moral tensions of contemporary life. However, while these studies provide valuable insights, they often address power and authority only indirectly, treating them as secondary aspects of broader thematic concerns.

There remains a lack of focused analysis on how power itself operates as a central organizing principle in Daruwalla's poetry. His work consistently depicts systems of governance, institutional authority, and mechanisms of control, yet these elements have not been examined in a systematic and integrated manner. The relationship between power, violence, and ethical responsibility, in particular, requires deeper critical attention.

Furthermore, existing scholarship tends to approach authority as a static concept, without fully exploring its dynamic and often contradictory nature in Daruwalla's work. His poetry suggests that power is not simply imposed from above but is dispersed across various social and institutional structures, influencing behaviour, perception, and identity. This complexity calls for a theoretical framework that can account for both the visible and invisible dimensions of authority.

The central problem addressed in this study is therefore to understand how Daruwalla represents and critiques power and authority in his poetry. By examining the interplay between institutional control, violence, and ethical ambiguity, the paper seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how power functions within his poetic universe.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the representation of power in the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla.
2. To analyse how authority operates within social and political structures depicted in his poems.
3. To explore the relationship between power and violence in his poetic narratives.
4. To investigate the portrayal of institutions such as the state, military, and bureaucracy.
5. To understand the ethical implications of power and authority in Daruwalla's work.

4. Review of Literature

Critical studies of Daruwalla's poetry have primarily focused on his treatment of violence, historical consciousness, and landscape imagery. Bruce King, in his discussion of modern Indian English poetry, characterizes Daruwalla as a poet of stark realism who confronts the harsh realities of contemporary life without romanticization (King 187). This emphasis on realism highlights the poet's engagement with social conflict and moral complexity, situating him within a broader tradition of politically conscious writing.

Scholars have also examined Daruwalla's use of landscape as a symbolic and thematic device. His depiction of rivers, deserts, and border regions is often interpreted as reflecting historical memory and cultural tension. These studies suggest that physical spaces in his poetry are deeply intertwined with political and

psychological realities. However, while such analyses acknowledge the presence of authority within these landscapes, they rarely foreground power as a central analytical category.

Theoretical perspectives on power provide a useful framework for extending these discussions. Michel Foucault conceptualizes power not as a centralized force but as a network of relations that operates through institutions, discourse, and social practices (Foucault 26). From this perspective, authority is dispersed rather than concentrated, influencing individuals through mechanisms such as surveillance and discipline. Applying this framework to Daruwalla's poetry allows for a more nuanced understanding of how power functions within his work.

Postcolonial criticism further highlights the role of authority in shaping social and political structures. In post-independence contexts, systems of governance often retain elements of colonial control, resulting in tensions between state authority and individual agency. Daruwalla's poetry reflects these tensions, portraying authority as both necessary for order and implicated in violence.

Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in scholarship concerning the integrated study of power and authority in Daruwalla's poetry. While critics have addressed related themes, a focused analysis of how power operates across his work is still lacking. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the multiple dimensions of authority and their implications within his poetic framework.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon a combination of Foucauldian theory, postcolonial perspectives, and ethical criticism to analyse the representation of power and authority in Daruwalla's poetry. These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which the complexities of power can be understood.

The work of Michel Foucault is particularly relevant in this context. Foucault challenges the traditional notion of power as something held exclusively by institutions or individuals, instead proposing that power is distributed across a network of relationships (26). It operates through systems of surveillance, discipline, and normalization, shaping behavior and perception at both individual and collective levels. In Daruwalla's poetry, such mechanisms of control are evident in the depiction of borders, administrative systems, and social hierarchies.

Postcolonial theory complements this perspective by examining how power structures are shaped by historical processes, particularly colonialism. In post-independence societies, authority often reflects a continuation of colonial governance, leading to tensions between inherited systems of control and the aspirations of newly formed nations. Daruwalla's poetry frequently engages with these tensions, revealing the complexities of authority in a postcolonial context.

Ethical criticism further enriches the analysis by focusing on the moral implications of power. Daruwalla's work raises questions about responsibility, justice, and the limits of authority. Individuals within his poems are often confronted with ethical dilemmas, highlighting the human cost of institutional control.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how power and authority function in Daruwalla's poetry. The framework allows for an analysis that considers both the structural and ethical dimensions of power, revealing its pervasive and often contradictory nature.

6. State Power and Political Authority

In the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla, state power emerges as one of the most dominant and pervasive forms of authority. His poems frequently depict institutions such as the government, military, and administrative machinery, revealing how authority operates through formal structures that regulate and control human life. These representations are neither celebratory nor entirely condemnatory; rather, they expose the contradictions inherent within systems of governance.

Daruwalla portrays the state as an impersonal entity, functioning through bureaucratic mechanisms that often obscure individual responsibility. Authority appears structured and legitimate on the surface, yet

beneath this façade lies a reliance on coercion and control. The law, which ideally symbolizes justice and order, is frequently shown to operate in ways that reinforce power rather than ensure fairness. This disjunction between legality and morality underscores the complexity of state authority in his work.

Drawing upon the theoretical insights of Michel Foucault, state power in Daruwalla's poetry can be understood as part of a broader network of control that extends beyond visible institutions (Foucault 26). Power is not confined to a central authority but dispersed across systems that shape behavior and perception. Administrative structures, border regulations, and official procedures become instruments through which power is exercised and maintained.

At the same time, Daruwalla reveals the fragility of such authority. The state's reliance on force and surveillance suggests an underlying insecurity, as power must constantly assert itself to remain effective. This tension between authority and vulnerability reflects the unstable nature of governance in postcolonial contexts, where inherited systems of control coexist with emerging forms of resistance. Through this nuanced portrayal, Daruwalla challenges the assumption that state power is absolute, presenting it instead as a contested and often precarious force.

7. Violence as an Instrument of Power

Violence occupies a central place in Daruwalla's poetic exploration of power. Rather than presenting violence as an aberration, his poetry suggests that it is deeply embedded within the structures of authority. Institutions that claim to maintain order frequently rely on force to assert their legitimacy, revealing the paradox at the heart of power: it seeks stability but often generates instability.

Daruwalla's depiction of violence is marked by its stark realism. Scenes of conflict, whether in the form of war, communal riots, or state-sanctioned action, are rendered without romanticization. Violence is not heroic; it is destructive, chaotic, and morally ambiguous. By stripping it of any idealized connotations, Daruwalla exposes its role as a tool of control rather than a means of justice.

From a theoretical perspective, violence can be seen as an extension of the power relations described by Michel Foucault, where authority operates through both visible and invisible mechanisms (Foucault 26). While surveillance and discipline function subtly, violence represents a more overt assertion of control. It becomes necessary when other forms of power fail to maintain order.

Importantly, Daruwalla also highlights the cyclical nature of violence. Acts of aggression often lead to further conflict, creating a continuous loop that reinforces the very structures of power responsible for initiating them. This cycle suggests that violence is not merely a consequence of authority but a condition for its survival.

Through his unflinching portrayal of violence, Daruwalla challenges readers to confront the ethical implications of power. Authority, in his poetry, is inseparable from the suffering it produces, raising questions about the legitimacy of systems that rely on coercion to sustain themselves.

8. Surveillance, Control, and Fear

Surveillance emerges as a subtle yet pervasive form of power in Daruwalla's poetry. Unlike overt violence, which is immediate and visible, surveillance operates quietly, shaping behavior through the constant possibility of observation. This form of control reflects the Foucauldian notion of power as internalized, where individuals regulate themselves in response to perceived authority (Foucault 201).

In Daruwalla's poetic landscapes, surveillance is often associated with borders, checkpoints, and administrative oversight. These spaces symbolize the reach of authority into everyday life, where individuals are subject to scrutiny and regulation. The presence of surveillance creates an atmosphere of tension, as actions are continuously monitored and judged.

Fear plays a crucial role in sustaining this system. Unlike direct coercion, which compels obedience through force, surveillance induces compliance by generating uncertainty. Individuals become aware of their

visibility within systems of power, leading them to modify their behavior accordingly. This internalization of control reflects the effectiveness of authority, as it reduces the need for overt intervention.

Daruwalla's poetry captures this psychological dimension of power with remarkable clarity. Characters are often depicted as navigating spaces where authority is both present and intangible, creating a sense of unease. The constant awareness of being observed transforms ordinary environments into sites of control.

Through his exploration of surveillance and fear, Daruwalla expands the understanding of power beyond physical force. Authority is not only exercised through visible institutions but also through psychological mechanisms that shape perception and behavior. This nuanced portrayal underscores the complexity of power in modern society.

9. Power and Landscape

Landscape plays a crucial role in Daruwalla's representation of power and authority. His poetry frequently situates human conflict within specific geographical settings, such as deserts, rivers, and border regions. These landscapes are not passive backdrops but active participants in the dynamics of power.

Borders, in particular, serve as powerful symbols of authority. They represent the division of space and the assertion of control over territory. However, Daruwalla's depiction of border landscapes often reveals their instability. Natural elements such as shifting sands or flowing rivers challenge the rigidity of political boundaries, highlighting the tension between natural and imposed forms of order.

Similarly, urban and rural landscapes reflect the presence of institutional authority. Cities become spaces of administrative control, while remote regions reveal the limits of governance. In both cases, geography is intertwined with power, shaping the experiences of those who inhabit these spaces.

Daruwalla's use of landscape also emphasizes the material consequences of authority. Environmental degradation, displacement, and conflict are often linked to the exercise of power, suggesting that control over space has far-reaching implications.

By integrating landscape into his exploration of authority, Daruwalla demonstrates that power is not confined to abstract systems but is embedded within the physical world. Geography becomes a medium through which power is both expressed and contested, reinforcing the interconnectedness of space and authority.

10. Ethical Crisis of Authority

One of the most striking aspects of Daruwalla's poetry is its exploration of the ethical dimensions of power. Authority, in his work, is rarely presented as morally clear or justified. Instead, it is characterized by ambiguity, where actions taken in the name of order often conflict with principles of justice and humanity.

Individuals within systems of power are frequently depicted as caught in moral dilemmas. Those who exercise authority must navigate the tension between duty and conscience, while those subjected to power confront the consequences of decisions beyond their control. This dual perspective highlights the complexity of ethical responsibility in hierarchical systems.

Daruwalla's poetry suggests that authority often operates within a framework that obscures accountability. Institutional structures diffuse responsibility, making it difficult to assign blame for acts of violence or injustice. This diffusion contributes to the persistence of unethical practices, as individuals become part of a system that prioritizes order over morality.

At the same time, the poet does not offer simple solutions to these dilemmas. His work resists moral absolutism, acknowledging the difficulties inherent in navigating complex social and political realities. This refusal to provide clear answers reflects a broader skepticism toward systems that claim moral authority.

Through his exploration of ethical crisis, Daruwalla reveals the human cost of power. Authority is not merely a structural phenomenon but a lived experience that shapes individual choices and consequences. By

foregrounding these ethical tensions, his poetry invites readers to critically examine the legitimacy of power in contemporary society.

11. Conclusion

The poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla offers a profound and multifaceted exploration of power and authority in the post-independence context. Through his depiction of state institutions, violence, surveillance, and landscape, Daruwalla reveals that power is neither stable nor absolute. Instead, it operates through complex networks that shape both external structures and internal experiences.

The analysis demonstrates that authority in Daruwalla's poetry is deeply intertwined with violence and control. Institutions that claim to maintain order often rely on coercion, exposing the contradictions at the heart of governance. At the same time, mechanisms such as surveillance and fear extend the reach of power into everyday life, influencing behavior and perception.

Daruwalla's work also highlights the ethical challenges associated with authority. By presenting individuals caught within systems of power, he underscores the moral ambiguities that arise when duty conflicts with conscience. This focus on ethical tension adds a human dimension to his exploration of power, emphasizing its impact on lived experience.

Ultimately, Daruwalla's poetry challenges conventional understandings of authority by exposing its fragility and complexity. Power, in his work, is not a monolithic force but a contested and evolving phenomenon shaped by historical, social, and ethical factors. Through his critical engagement with these themes, Daruwalla offers a compelling reflection on the nature of authority in the modern world, inviting readers to question its legitimacy and consequences.

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